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Commitment to Care

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Commitment to Care

Jody Reyes '96 embraces her new role as leading cancer center's clinical director.

From Bloomington to Iraq, Jody (Shepard) Reyes has thrived on the mission of bringing health and comfort to her patients. In her newest role, she is bringing that commitment to patients in support of their battles with cancer.

In the fall of 2010, Jody joined City of Hope National Medical Center as clinical director of hematology and hematopoietic cell transplantation (HTC), leading a team of nurses and support staff who provide direct care to patients battling cancers of the blood and immune system, such as leukemia and lymphoma.

Based near Los Angeles, City of Hope is part of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, a nonprofit alliance of 21 of the world's leading cancer centers.

City of Hope leads the HTC field as one of the world's largest and most successful transplant centers, performing more than 525 transplants annually.

Jody brings an important set of skills to a critical post, according to Shirley Johnson, chief nursing and patient services officer. "More than half of our inpatients on any given day are hematology patients. Coordinating care for that program is a significant responsibility, and not just anybody could fill those shoes," says Johnson. "Jody possesses well-developed leadership and communication skills, and she really shares our vision — continuing to improve our already excellent outcomes for transplant patients."

"The way I see it," says Jody, "my job is to create an environment where everybody who reports through me — and quite frankly, those who don't — can thrive. If leadership remains focused on caring for our staff, they can just show up for work and give their heart and soul to the patients and families. They then can go home after their work is done and recharge their batteries so they can come back to work and do it all over again."

Jody received her bachelor's degree in nursing from Illinois Wesleyan in 1996 and later earned an M.S.B.A. from Boston University. After college, she spent two years as an ambulatory care nurse for Bloomington neurosurgeon Ann Stroink '76. In 1999, she joined the Navy as an active-duty nurse. She arrived in Kuwait four years later as a member of the team whose mission was to construct a mobile surgical hospital. But before that could happen, she was selected to augment a shock trauma platoon and soon found herself on the front lines with the first wave of Marines heading to Baghdad Iraq. (Jody's time in Iraq was reported in the Summer 2004 *IWU Magazine*.)

As the first line of defense for critically injured patients, Jody and her Navy team provided lifesaving trauma care. "We didn't perform major surgeries," she says. "Our job was to stop the bleeding and stabilize the patients

for transport. We saved those who would have never survived a long ambulance ride." Her experience overseas proved revelatory.

"The military is where I learned the importance of developing a strong team and that every single individual has something to contribute," she says.

"That experience reminded me that life is very precious and very short, and that you shouldn't waste time doing something that you don't love. I loved being in the Navy, but I loved being a cancer nurse even more."

Although she left the military in 2004, Jody continued to work in a variety of management roles at Naval Medical Center San Diego in the Hematology-Oncology Department. In 2006, Jody traveled to Zambia, Africa. As part of a Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief in Africa, she collaborated with a team of health-care providers, chaplains and social workers to create an education program focused on palliative care for that country's military personnel. In late 2008 Jody was recruited by the University of California-San Diego Medical Center to serve in the role of clinical director for oncology nursing services at the UCSD Moores Cancer Center.

Jody — who now lives in Glendora, Calif., with her husband Jose, 5-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son — notes that she first discovered her affinity for cancer care while working as a nurse's aide during nursing school at IWU.

"I just fell in love. I fell in love with the patients. I fell in love with the families," she says. "Cancer patients invite us into their world during what will probably be the most trying time of their lives, and that is a privilege. It's something that is very sacred."

This story is adapted from a piece that originally appeared in Hope News, a weekly publication of City of Hope, and is used by permission.

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